SHIFTING THE CENTER: PILOTING EMBEDDED TUTORING MODELS TO SUPPORT MULTIMODAL COMMUNICATION ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES

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Beginning in its third year, the Georgia Tech Communication Center began investigating embedded tutoring as part of the overall slate of tutoring services already in practice. Because our center remains in a nascent period of identity, we continue to enjoy an unusual amount of flexibility in how we are exploring new ways to work within the tutoring milieu—that is, we have not had time to become complacent in providing services in particular ways. Additionally, because we are somewhat unusual given our professional staff of postdoctoral fellows, we have a broader ability to work across disciplines with instructors who are more willing to work with postdocs than with undergraduate peer tutors. Our aim is to build embedded tutoring programs with our postdocs, gain the confidence of faculty members across campus, and, eventually, begin embedding peer-tutors in classes.

Our programmatic aims are fivefold:

1) To better understand the pedagogical goals of course instructors in order to best address the needs of students (both those in embedded courses as well as those in similar courses without embedded tutors) who seek our tutoring services.
2) To involve instructors (or program leaders) in our work so that they might better understand our mission and the goals of a multimodal writing curriculum.
3) To more diversely employ the pedagogical experience our postdoctoral professional tutors possess.
4) To provide our professional tutors with additional professional development opportunities that could help them better understand the work of colleagues in other disciplines.
5) To make our work more visible across disciplines, units, and programs because our center is new to campus.

While many of our programmatic aims are targeting a more integrated position for the center within the larger community of the Institute, the overarching theme of our embedded tutoring pilots has been to leverage the skills of our unique population of postdoctoral fellows who serve as professional tutors in the center. Each of these fellows also teaches in our multimodal writing and communication program, which provides the instruction for first-year writing and some technical writing courses at the Institute.

In this article we explain how we have begun to move toward our programmatic aims through our first two embedded tutoring pilots, and we showcase the work we have done with the further aim of sharing our pilots as potential models for other writing centers. The case studies we present detail the planning, implementation, and results of our two pilot programs.

Theoretical Grounding

Embedded tutoring at Georgia Tech responds to the presence of what Terry Meyers Zawacki calls "institutional realities" (n. pag.). Zawacki oversees George Mason University's Writing Fellows program and finds that, because of the number of embedded tutors and fellowed classes she oversees, she often faces resistance from faculty who are uncertain about the tutors' roles or their own responsibilities. As Zawacki argues, this resistance can create friction that can hinder student learning. Because our postdoctoral fellows are autonomous instructors, they have a stronger sense of what instructors in other disciplines might find challenging, even daunting, when including writing and communication projects in their courses. We hypothesized that the "common ground" created by embedded tutoring could lead to additional and more successful collaborations with faculty, which would, ultimately, help us better serve our students. However, we also recognized the need to guard

against any perceptions of differing pedagogical strategies that might lead to conflicts about assessing writing on the part of tutors and professors. Joyce Kinkead, et al., echo these concerns as a common problem tutors (embedded or not) face when working with poorly designed or poorly articulated assignments (1-5). This tension is something to keep in mind in our program where the embedded tutor is not an undergraduate, but a Ph.D. with years of teaching experience and pedagogical training—training that can be helpful but can also complicate the tutor's relationship with the classroom instructor.

Having professional rather than peer tutors embedded in disciplinary writing classes can also have certain benefits over, or at least sidestep certain problems with, some writing fellows programs. For instance, Emily Hall and Bradley Hughes focus on the challenges associated with developing professional relationships between fellows and professors, explaining that "within the Writing Fellows literature…there's a gap between the impressive potential that Fellows have to be agents of change in WAC and the cautionary tales from the complex realities of Fellows actually working with faculty and student-writers" (22). They attribute these challenges to the complexity of writing fellows' jobs, and argue that the resulting gap necessitates not just extensive collaboration with instructors on course goals and design but also training in writing theory for fellows. Given the extensive pedagogical training and experience our professional tutors already possess, some of this process can be bypassed—or at least streamlined—to allow for a less demanding collaboration on the part of instructors. Once we gain instructors' trust, we will move to include peer tutors in our embedded programs. Beginning our pilots with the professional tutors, we believe, will help instructors more readily accept the inclusion of peer tutors in future courses.

On the other side of the collaboration, the instructors for the courses in which we embed professional tutors can learn more about the difficult process of teaching writing and communication. Irene Clark credits working in writing centers as one important way for instructors to better understand the many complexities involved in teaching writing: "In the Writing Center, teachers who may never have reflected on their own composing processes and who have had little formal composition training get to observe real student writers in action and to gain insight into how writing actually occurs" (347). Essentially we aim to bring this experience from the center to the instructors in their own classrooms—creating situations where we help them become better teachers and communicators while also helping their students. By extension, we hope that our collaborations will help them understand and support our work more fully in the future, which would represent a significant institutional change at Georgia Tech. As Jennifer Corroy notes at the end of her evaluation of the Writing Fellows Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, institutional change can be a reasonable expectation of embedded tutoring programs: "Change most frequently occurs at the lowest level, that of individual reflections and interactions. If widespread lower-level change happens, the institution will change in an increasingly conspicuous manner" (43). Corroy argues that institutional change is never merely the result of a desire for change, rather it must reflect "a realistic determination of goals," and that "only by identifying those desires and goals can Writing Fellows become true agents, rather than unknowing participants, of institutional change" (43). As we move forward with additional pilots, we will incorporate more clearly-defined desires and goals agreed upon by all collaborators.

This year we launched two pilot programs: the first was in a traditional 16-week undergraduate course, and the second was in a 5-week summer preparatory bridge program for underachieving minority students. Both programs were chosen because the instructor (or program director) approached us to ask for help with the writing and communication projects in her course/program. As part of our center planning, we had already been discussing embedded tutoring, but had not yet found willing collaborators. In both cases, our offer to pilot embedded tutoring was met with enthusiasm. Because neither instructor had considered embedded tutoring as an option (in one case, she had never heard of such a thing), we had the luxury of complete flexibility in designing and implementing our pilots. The only drawback was that in each case we had very little planning time before the course/program launched.

Georgia Tech Embedded Tutoring Pilot Project: Undergraduate Philosophy Course

In fall 2013, we conducted a pilot project with an upper-level philosophy class taught by a Public Policy professor. The class required students to work in small "teams" of 6-8 led by graduate students who acted as team facilitators to create research-based arguments responding to fractious problems in biotechnological research and applications. Students' responses to these problems came in two parts: in the form of research

presentations and white papers recommending particular courses of action. The course featured facilitators who worked with the individual groups to provide guidance and feedback on their projects. These facilitators included librarians, Georgia Tech graduate students, and Georgia State University law students. All of the facilitators attended a seminar and met once a week throughout the semester that focused in part on coordinating their efforts for facilitating each groups' work.

The professor contacted the Communication Center's director to request an intervention tailored to the specific communication needs of the students. Seeing this as an opportunity to "export Writing Center philosophy and practice" to other parts of Georgia Tech's campus (Severino and Knight 216), and to both assist the professor and further our programmatic goal of involving instructors in our work to help them better understand our mission and the goals of a multimodal writing curriculum, the director assigned a professional tutor to first attend the graduate seminar to learn about the professor's goals and expectations for the assignment and to find out about the students' progress from the facilitators. This meeting helped the tutor determine how to best assist the students in meeting the communication goals of the projects. Based on both the meetings and the tutor's experience in leading oral communication workshops, the tutor created a workshop on effective coordination of visual and oral components of slide presentations. He then visited the class, delivered the workshop, and addressed questions from the whole class before visiting with the groups individually to address their concerns regarding their presentations and to encourage the groups to visit the Communication Center for further assistance. These individual meetings proved to be an invaluable part of the intervention, as they not only gave the tutor a chance to meet each group and provide feedback on their particular projects, but also gave the groups the opportunity to get a glimpse of the way that group-tutoring sessions are conducted in the center. In this way, the tutor was able to act as what Severino and Knight call an "ambassador" for the Communication Center, making connections with students and raising awareness of the Communication Center's mission and services (223).

The workshop facilitated this heightened awareness while also allowing the tutor to represent the aims of a multimodal writing curriculum in an environment outside that of the traditional communication classroom. The professor and her facilitators indicated that the limited intervention was useful for the students in preparing their final presentations, but ultimately both they and the Communication Center staff felt that the class presented an opportunity for a more extensive and productive collaboration. Conversations with the professor produced a couple of possibilities for semester-long forms of embedded collaboration. One possibility that arose in these conversations is for a professional tutor to act as one of the class facilitators for one of the groups. However, understanding that such an arrangement would limit the tutor's ability to assist the entire class, we proposed another possible form of extended intervention, in which a tutor would act as an embedded representative throughout the semester. As stated at the outset, one of our main programmatic aims for this project is to facilitate a better understanding of the pedagogical goals of course instructors to best address the needs of students. An extended embedded experience of this kind would facilitate this goal by allowing the tutor to create presentations and workshops that would address the needs of the students in the class, as well as meet individually with groups throughout the semester. Because this is a problem-based class requiring students to make arguments regarding "fractious problems" in the field of biotechnology, prolonged involvement in the class would aid the tutor in becoming more familiar with the actual content that the students are researching and discussing. In addition, the professional tutors' high proficiency in "the general academic skills of open-minded inquiry, critical analysis, and use of sources to support an argument," identified by Severino and Trachsel as major assets of embedded tutors, would make them an excellent fit to assist the students in meeting the professor's educational goals for the class.

Georgia Tech Embedded Tutoring Pilot Project: OMED Challenge Seminar

In summer 2014, we conducted a second pilot, serving as a counterpoint to the Public Policy pilot project. Focusing on interpersonal development and communication for STEM majors, the five-week seminar course in which the embedded tutor was placed is part of an intensive preparatory bridge program for underachieving minority students who will attend Georgia Tech in the fall. Established in 1979, the Office of Minority Education's Challenge Program is a comprehensive program within which the seminar forms the centerpiece for writing and communication within the spate of STEM-related summer start-up courses that students take as non-credit hours during the program. Because the program is an intensive student-centered experience, the

seminar emphasizes roles for students that are also key to good tutoring: participant, reviewer, and creator. The "challenge" for this embedded tutoring partnership was to create relationships and methods by which the students would learn to reflect on their communication processes, learn best practices for peer reviewing and group work, and understand how to use the Communication Center as a crucial support service for multimodal communication as they go forward in their academic lives.

The program instructor, a doctoral student completing her degree in History, Technology, and Society, constructed the seminar as a hybrid between interactive lecture and group-work sessions. Her focus on a multimodal, process-oriented approach to the seminar aligned with one of the goals of the center to work with instructors to implement best practices. The Director of the Writing and Communication Program, a reference librarian, members of Communication Center, and representatives from a community-campus partnership gave presentations on various topics, including tips for academic success, for employing effective communication in multiple modes, and for using campus resources. Additionally, within the context of outward-facing communication strategies, students were considering the complexities of the relationship between Georgia Tech and the nearby Westside Community, traditionally an area with a high poverty and crime rate. Strongly sponsored by Dean Jacqueline Royster, the Westside Communities Alliance (WCA) mission and initiatives provided problem-solving opportunities that fundamentally aligned with the STEM focus of the bridge program. The role of the embedded tutor was part of a network intersecting other student support services and programs within the Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts, yet she worked within her own "native" role as a tutor in the Communication Center and as an instructor in our multimodal Writing and Communication Program.

The Challenge seminar instructor assigned high- and low-stakes writing and multimodal projects, culminating in a group presentation evaluated by a panel of three rotating judges. The final project included the professional and outreach documents that the students had produced on a website that served as a central digital hub for all of these materials, thereby incorporating the concepts emphasized during the interactive lectures. This structure shifted the course towards the pedagogical practices and goals of our Writing and Communication Program, raising the visibility of our work while also allowing for the further professional development of this embedded tutor as she interacted with these units and more fundamentally internalized the disciplinary approaches of other programs across campus. Additionally, the seminar content and organization allowed the tutor to drawn on her prior interests in areas of identity and social justice, connecting them to her pedagogical experience in facilitating discussion in small groups and in scaffolding assignments.

The work of the embedded tutor within the classroom was a fluid extension of the aims of the course through all modes of communication, occurring largely within the time and space of seminar sessions in which the students broke into teams for group-work. During those times, she circulated around, asking very general questions. Almost always, these inquiries gave the students an opportunity to come together as a group. Although the class was conducted in a large lecture hall with fixed tables and seats, the Director of the Writing and Communication program had emphasized the context of the space and the kinds of interactions it promoted during her interactive lecture, raising students' awareness of their physical surroundings and the potential disjunctions between their classroom environment and the kind of learning in which they were engaging. The embedded tutor saw her role as providing extra support so that students were able to receive face-to-face feedback on their projects, thereby reducing the impact of the fixed classroom arrangement. These interactions allowed her to provide students with a forum to rearticulate their understanding of each assignment, pose questions about potential counterarguments or options that they might not have considered, ask them about future preparations, and encourage them to continue good work.

Since the aims of this pilot project included promoting the use of the Communication Center to students and facilitating understanding of shared goals between the Center and Office of Minority Education, this partnership was both local and programmatic. These dual circumstances presented difficulties and opportunities, mostly because of the small amount of planning time before the pilot began. Although the students in the course were matriculating at Georgia Tech in the fall, they were not yet students and could not, therefore, use our online appointment system; they instead had to make appointments via e-mail for tutoring outside the classroom hour. Their tight schedules made this situation less than ideal; however, in addition to offering tutoring, the embedded tutor was able to devote time and energy to introducing the center and its services in a tailored fashion for the students who did come for tutoring.

This introduction was reinforced in the course when the embedded tutor presented on the resources

beyond the classroom available to students on campus. She asked the students to treat approaching one of these services as a rhetorical situation, identifying for themselves what sort of help they were seeking, what the service specifically offered, and what needed to be communicated within that negotiation between they required and what could be provided. To further illuminate such a negotiation, the Associate Director of the Communication Center and the embedded tutor role-played an unproductive tutoring session, and then a volunteer from the class role-played a productive session, using the information and tips that had evolved from student input.

The success of this embedded tutoring partnership will be long-term. In the pilot program, students benefited nominally from the extra support of the tutor and were continually exposed to the resources available to them at the center. The wrap-up meeting between the Communication Center team, featuring the Associate Director of the Center and embedded tutor, and the organizational leaders of the bridge program, including Directors of the Office of Minority Education, provided a fruitful exchange of ideas to move the partnership forward through means of intentional logistical and theoretical collaborations. Additionally, this discussion underscored the need for continuing the embedded tutoring model in that the pedagogical outcomes of the course, the program, and the center were very openly connected in exciting ways.

The recommendations of the group included creating a peer tutor role to work alongside the professional embedded tutor, thereby moving the partnership towards the programmatic goal of the Communication Center to eventually embed undergraduate tutors. The seminar instructor shared feedback from students' evaluations indicating that the goals of the course need to be more explicitly articulated and summarized throughout the program. Various strategies for these closer alignments were discussed among participants, all of which helped to more sharply define the interactions and general goals between the instructor and embedded tutor. The instructor also expressed her interest in placing more emphasis on student writing, since she noted a disconnection between the students' evaluations of the seminar and their ability to reflect and understand their own writing processes and progress. As this collaboration moves forward, in order for the Communication Center to best serve the students in the bridge program each summer and after its conclusion when they matriculate as students at Georgia Tech, discussions with these administrative partners will need to be situated within an ongoing framework of exchange that continues throughout the academic year. Furthermore, more detailed research in the form of surveys and follow-up interviews with students should be conducted.

Since this pilot directly addressed the interpersonal and academic skills that students would need to succeed in their multimodal first-year composition courses, but did not focus on individual student writing, as the partnership continues, new strategies for reaching students to help them improve their writing are needed. In their essay "Getting the Writing Center into FYC Classrooms," Dvorak, Bruce, and Lutkewitte point out that research has shown that in-classroom tutoring and out-of-class mentoring have helped to facilitate students' development as "successful college students," but that no conclusions from this body of work can be drawn about the impact on students' writing skills (3). The anecdotal findings of this pilot course support this model of combining tutoring and mentoring for this bridge seminar course and also demonstrate the importance of the assessment that more research is needed to understand how such work can improve students' writing skills.

Future Implications

The most important anecdotal finding from our two pilot studies was that there are instructors at Georgia Tech who are eager to collaborate and have embedded tutors in their courses and programs. We also achieved our goal of learning more about the expectations of instructors and transmitting that important information to all the tutors in our center to better help students in the course as well as students in other courses doing similar disciplinary work. The professional tutors who were embedded gained additional contexts both for tutoring and for their own teaching, especially for multimodal first-year writing composition courses targeting STEM majors. The professional tutors also benefited from networking and exposure to pedagogical and administrative structures outside of their home unit—an important professional development opportunity that will likely serve them when they move into permanent positions at other universities after completing their postdoctoral fellowships. We also succeeded in creating a better understanding of the work we do with instructors outside of our discipline. This is particularly important because a Public Policy professor has been named the new director of our Honors Program, and has already expressed a strong interest in future collaborations. Likewise, the OMED Challenge Program Directors are eager to collaborate

on future projects. Overall, we are committed to the creation of what Severino and Knight call a "ripple effect" of awareness emerging from a "center philosophy and practice, that moves us toward "the perfect outcome": "a university that *is* a Writing Center" (223-5, emphasis added). Already we have gained important foundational knowledge for designing and redesigning embedded tutoring collaborations that will become a cornerstone of the services we offer and will more firmly integrate our work into the larger institutional community.

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